DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 088 PS 026 104

TITLE	The Study of Opportunities for and Barriers to Family Involvement in Education: Preliminary Results. Survey.
INSTITUTION	National Opinion Research Center, Chicago, IL.
SPONS AGENCY	Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (ED), Washington, DC.; GTE Foundation, Stamford, CT.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	27p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	After School Programs; Elementary Education; Employer Employee Relationship; Family Involvement; Family School Relationship; Junior High Schools; Middle Schools; *Parent Attitudes; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; *Parent Student Relationship; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Partnerships in Education
IDENTIFIERS	Role of Technology

ABSTRACT

Participants were drawn from the 1996 General Social Survey, which constructed a nationally representative sample of households to study social indicators in the United States. Findings summarized in this report reflect information collected from about two-thirds of parents identified in the earlier survey. During a 10-minute telephone interview, the study asked parents of elementary and middle school students to report on several dimensions of their involvement in their children's education, including: (1) how parents feel about their opportunities to be involved in their children's schooling; (2) how schools encourage parental involvement in students' learning; (3) what additional educational resources parents value; (4) how and what schools communicate to parents about students' learning; and (5) what employers do to support parental involvement in schooling. Key survey findings include: (1) parents think schools see them as important partners in helping their children learn; (2) an overwhelming majority of parents believe that they and their children's teachers should learn more about how they can be effectively involved in their children's education; (3) according to parents, elementary schools appear to do better in key aspects of family involvement than do middle schools; (4) new technologies remain an untapped resource for schools to communicate with parents; (5) most parents are either not involved, or would like to be more involved, in decisions affecting the academic life of the school; and (6) a third of parents said they signed agreements with teachers about how each would support their child's learning. (Seven tables summarizing survey results are included.) (LPP)

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PARTNERSHIP
for Family
Involvement
in Education

The Study of Opportunities for and Barriers to Family Involvement in Education

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

A Survey Sponsored by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the U.S. Department of Education, and the GTE Foundation
Conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at The University of Chicago

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OVERVIEW

The Study of Opportunities for and Barriers to Family Involvement in Education is sponsored by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the GTE Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education. Through a ten-minute telephone interview, the study asks parents of elementary and middle school* students to report on several dimensions of their involvement in their children's education, including:

- How parents feel about their opportunities to be involved in their children's schooling
- How schools encourage parental involvement in students' learning
- What additional educational resources parents value, for example, information on college going and the use of after-school programs to enhance learning
- How and what schools communicate to parents about students' learning, for example, the use of technology in learning and communicating with families
- What employers do to support parental involvement in schooling.

Study participants are drawn from the 1996 General Social Survey, which constructed a nationally representative sample of households to study social indicators in the United States in the Spring of 1996. Each participant was asked to discuss the schooling experiences of one child during the 1996-1997 school year. That child was randomly selected from all of the children enrolled in grades one through eight in a regular school and for whom the participant was a primary caretaker. The preliminary results presented here reflect information collected from approximately two-thirds of parents identified by the earlier survey. Because interviewed parents resemble the full sample on key demographic characteristics, the results below are likely to become more precise as additional interviews are completed, but may not change dramatically. The study is being conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at The University of Chicago.

* Elementary school denotes grades one through four, middle school grades five through eight.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Parent Survey on Findings on Family Involvement In Education: Parents Say Schools Try to Keep Them Involved, But Much More Work Is Needed,

Preliminary findings from a new parent survey on family involvement in education were released today by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the U.S. Department of Education, and the GTE Foundation. The survey was conducted to develop a better understanding of family involvement in education -- an issue that many educational researchers, teachers, parents, and corporate leaders say is the most important ingredient in a good education.

Parents of elementary and middle school students were asked about many aspects of their involvement in their children's education and about how their school keeps them involved. Key survey findings include:

- **Parents think schools see them as important partners in helping their children learn, and there is plenty of good news about family involvement.** 88% of parents report that their children's schools treat them as important partners in encouraging their children to learn. 86% say teachers generally listen to what parents have to say, 66% say teachers give their child homework assignments that are designed for the family to do together at least once a month, and 62% of parents say teachers regularly communicate with them about their children's progress.

- **But, an overwhelming majority of parents believe that they and their children's teachers should learn more about how they can be effectively involved in their child's education.** 79% of parents report that they want to learn more about how to be involved in their children's learning. 77% believe teachers could

learn more about involving them in their children's learning.

- **According to parents, elementary schools appear to do better in key aspects of family involvement than do middle schools.** Parents of elementary school students report schools do better in the following areas than reported by parents of middle school students: explaining to parents what students should be able to know and do in each subject (62% of elementary school parents say the school did very well, as opposed to 45% in middle school); inviting parents to observe classes in session (41% of elementary school parents say they have been invited many times, as opposed to 27% in middle school); discussing with parents a summer reading list for children (57% of elementary school parents, as opposed to 41% in middle school); and inviting parents to participate in school committees or councils more than once or twice (61% of elementary school parents, as opposed to 46% in middle school).

- **For many, new technologies remain an untapped resource for schools to communicate with parents.** Only 12% of parents reported that the school makes available information through its web site on the internet on school activities, homework assignments, or student progress. 11% said the school made available information through e-mail, and 21% said the school made available information through voice mail.

- **Most parents are either not involved -- or would like to be more involved -- in decisions affecting the academic life of the school.** Only 13% of parents say they have a lot of input into what subjects are taught, 11% say they have a lot of input into how the school budget is spent, and less than 5% say they have a lot of input into teacher hiring and promotion.

- **A third of parents said they signed agreements with teachers about how each would support a child's learning.** 37% signed an agreement with teachers about supporting learning in the classroom. 32% signed an agreement about how to support learning at home.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AND BARRIERS TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

- **Good News! Parents think school staff see them as important partners in helping their children learn.** Eighty-eight percent of parents report that their children's schools treat them as important partners in encouraging their children to learn.

- **But! Schools still need to work harder in meeting parents needs.** While schools do many things to involve parents in the schooling process, fewer than half of all parents had been formally asked by schools about what assistance they might need to be more involved in their children's learning.

- **And! Parents are eager to increase their involvement in their children's education and believe teachers should have more training in working with families.** Seventy-nine percent of parents interviewed report that they want to learn more about how to be involved in their children's learning. Almost 77 percent believed teachers could learn more in involving parents in their children's learning.

- **Some schools seek to engage parents as partners in their children learning by signing learning agreements.** Only 37 percent of parents and teachers signed an agreement about how they would support learning in the classroom; 32 percent signed an agreement for supporting learning at home.

- **The new technologies are not widespread as tools for schools to communicate with parents.** Seventy-six percent of parents reported that their schools used two or more technologies to communicate with parents--usually newsletters and telephone calls. Schools are now beginning to explore the additional opportunities for interaction afforded by voicemail (21 percent), web sites (12 percent), and electronic mail (11 percent).

- **There is a gap between schools letting parents understand what their child should know academically and showing them what constitutes successful work at their child's grade.** While 54 percent of parents said the

school let them know what their child should know and be able to do in each subject, a full 62 percent of parents said they were either not provided with samples of successful student work or were provided with samples "just okay."

- **Parents express a strong demand for after-school programs:** 82 percent of parents have a child who attends an after-school program or would like their child to attend an after school program.

- **Computer classes, art and music courses, and community service rank high as activities for after school programs.** Of these parents (who enroll or would like to enroll their child in an after-school program), 96 percent feel that their child would benefit from an after-school program that included computer technology classes and 92 percent feel that their child would benefit from arts, music and cultural after-school activities. Among middle school parents, 91 percent favor after-school community service or volunteer opportunities for their children.

- **Parents want to be partners but are not integrally involved in decisions affecting the academic life of a school.** Over 66 percent of parents have no input into teacher hiring and promotion and 25 percent are involved some but believe they should have more say; 56 percent have no input into the amount of time allocated to subjects and 33 percent say they have some say but believe they should have more; 40 percent have no input into the subjects being taught and 44 percent say they have some but believe they should have more; and 38 percent have no input into how the school budget is spent and 46 percent say they have some but believe they should have more. Parents are most involved in setting school discipline practices, not academic policies (77 percent some or a lot).

- **Parents want information on college-going.** Of the 84 percent of parents who were employed at some time during the last school year, 30 percent had employers who provide information about ways to pay for their children to attend college or receive other education after high school. Seventy-nine percent of working parents reported that having this service was important to them.

Families involved in education: How do parents feel about their involvement in their children's education?			
	All Parents	Elementary School Parents	Middle School Parents
Parents who want to learn more about how to be involved in their children's learning.	**79**	81	77
Parents who want to be more involved at their children's school.	**73**	73	73
Parents who think their children's teachers could learn more about involving parents in their children's learning.	**77**	75	78

- Parents in the Family Involvement Study are eager to increase their involvement in their children's education: 79 percent of parents interviewed report that they want to learn more about how to be involved in their children's learning. Seventy-seven percent of parents also think that their children's teachers could learn more about involving parents in their children's learning.

Involving Parents in the Schooling Process: What are schools doing to bring parents in? (Percent of parents reporting that their schools take the following steps to involve parents:)			
	All Parents	Elementary School* Parents	Middle School* Parents
Treat parents as partners in students' learning	**88**	89	87
Ask parents how to encourage involvement	**Informally . . . . . 63** **Formally 46**	Informally . . . . . 67 Formally 46	Informally . . . . . 59 Formally 47
Enable parents to reach children at school	**90**	91	90
Schedule meetings off of regular business hours	**78**	82	73
Try to involve both parents whether or not they live in the same household	**62**	62	61
Offer after hours call-in times	**57**	59	56
Discuss a summer reading list with parents	**50**	57	41
Require parents to sign children's homework each night	**40**	47	32
Provide child care during parent-teacher conferences	**28**	32	23
Provide a place for parents to meet	**28**	30	26

- Eighty-eight percent of parents report that their children's schools treat them as important partners in encouraging their children to learn. While schools do many things to involve parents in the schooling process, fewer than half of all parents had been formally asked by schools about what assistance they might

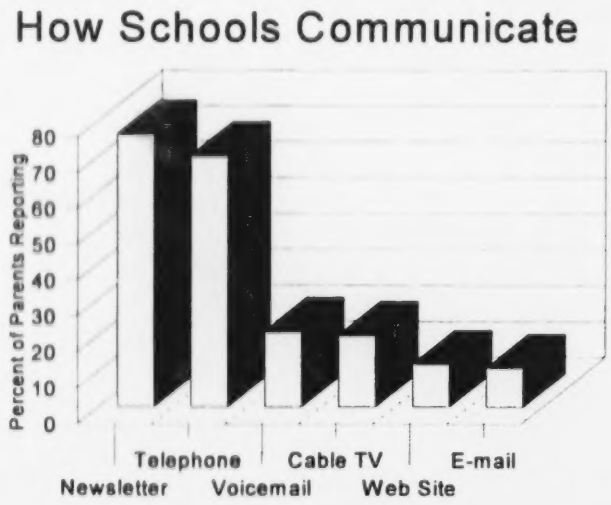
need to be more involved in their children's learning.

Teachers and Parents Joining Together (Percent of parents reporting that:)			
	All Parents	Elementary School Parents	Middle School Parents
Teachers require parents to sign children's homework each night	**40**	47	32
Parents and teachers signed an agreement to support in-class learning	**37**	38	37
Parents and teachers signed an agreement to support learning at home	**32**	33	31

- Parents and teachers are joining together to recognize that everyone must support learning wherever it takes place - in the classroom or in the home. The 1996-1997 school year began with 37 percent of parents signing agreements with their children's teachers to support in-class learning. Thirty-two percent of parents signed agreements with teachers to support at-home learning. In-class learning meets at-home learning when parents review their children's homework each night as part of a nightly requirement to sign assignments.

Information from the school: How are schools communicating with parents? (Percent of parents whose schools use the following ways to exchange information with parents:)			
	All Parents	Elementary School Parents	Middle School Parents
Newsletter	**76**	80	71
Telephone Calls to Parents	**70**	71	69
Voicemail	**21**	17	26
Community Cable Television	**20**	20	20
Web Site	**12**	13	11
Electronic Mail	**11**	11	11

- Seventy-six percent of parents reported that their schools used two or more technologies to communicate with parents. While newsletters and telephone calls are the most common ways for schools to exchange information with parents, schools are now beginning to explore the additional opportunities for interaction afforded by voicemail, web sites and electronic mail.



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Expectations and Options: What information do parents have access to?						
	All Parents		Elementary School Parents		Middle School Parents	
What are schools telling parents about?	**(Percent whose schools did 'very well' in sharing:)**	**(Percent of remaining parents who would like to know more:)**	(Percent whose schools did 'very well' in sharing:)	(Percent of remaining parents who would like to know more:)	(Percent whose schools did 'very well' in sharing:)	(Percent of remaining parents who would like to know more:)
How students are expected to behave	**69**	**25**	71	79	67	80
What students should know and be able to do	**54**	**43**	62	92	45	94
Examples of successful work done by students	**38**		**44**		31	
Information about educational options for future high school students	**29**	**87**			29	87
How are employers helping to inform parents? (84 percent of study participants were employed at some point during the school year. Of them:)	**(Percent of employed parents who value:)**	**(Percent whose most recent job included:)**	(Percent of employed parents who value:)	(Percent whose most recent job included:)	(Percent of employed parents who value:)	(Percent whose most recent job included:)
Employer-provided information about ways to pay for post-high school education	**79**	**30**	82	28	76	32

- Sixty-nine percent of parents rated their schools as doing 'very well' in letting parents know how students are expected to behave in the classroom. Fewer (56 percent) gave the same 'very well' rating about how well schools let parents know what children should know and be able to do at their grade level in each subject. Less satisfied parents are more interested in learning more about achievement goals than about discipline issues. As with achievement goals, the demand from middle school parents (87 percent) to know about educational options for future high school students greatly outstripped the supply of middle schools who communicate these options 'very well' (29 percent).

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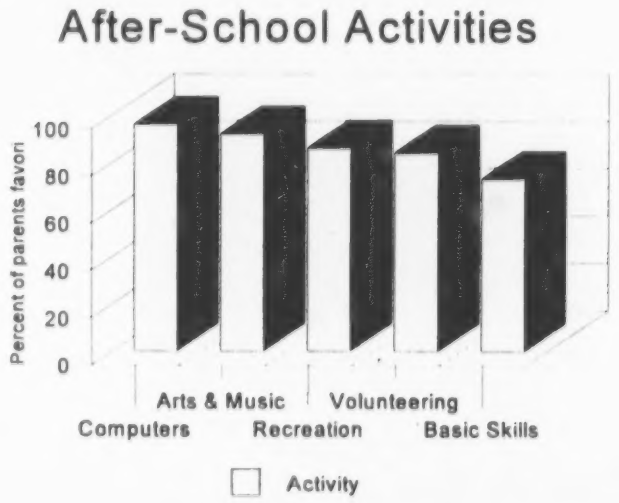
Beyond the school day and the school year (Percent of all parents who:)			
	All Parents	Elementary School Parents	Middle School Parents
Have a child in an after-school program	**35**	32	39
Pay fees for an after-school program	**18**	19	17
Are interested in free after-school programs	**79**	77	82
Would pay a fee for an after-school program	**74**	73	76
Have a child in a school-based summer program	**18**	20	16
Paid for a school-based summer program	**10**	10	10
Are interested in a free school-based summer program	**70**	69	71
Would pay a fee for a school-based summer program	**74**	71	77

- Parents express a strong demand for after-school programs: 82 percent of parents have a child who attends an after-school program or would like their child to attend an after school program.

After-School Activities: What do parents want? (Percent of parents with children in after-school programs or who would like their children to attend an after-school program reporting that their child would benefit from:)			
	Parents Who Want or Use After-School Programs	Elementary School Parents	Middle School Parents
Computer technology classes	**96**	96	96
Arts, music and cultural programs	**92**	94	89
Supervised recreational activities	**86**	86	86
Community service or volunteer opportunities	**84**	77	91
Basic skills enrichment or tutoring	**73**	72	74

- Of these parents (who enroll or would like to enroll their child in an after-school program), 96 percent feel that their child would benefit from an after-school program that included computer technology classes and 92 percent feel that their child would benefit from arts, music and cultural after-school activities. Among middle school parents, 91 percent favor after-school community service or volunteer opportunities for their children.



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